

Rise and shine

Sgt. 1st Class Horace Jackson, Company A, 143rd Ordnance Battalion, looms large standing atop an equally intimidating obstacle during the 2007 APG Noncommissioned Officer and Soldier of the Year competition held the week of April 16.



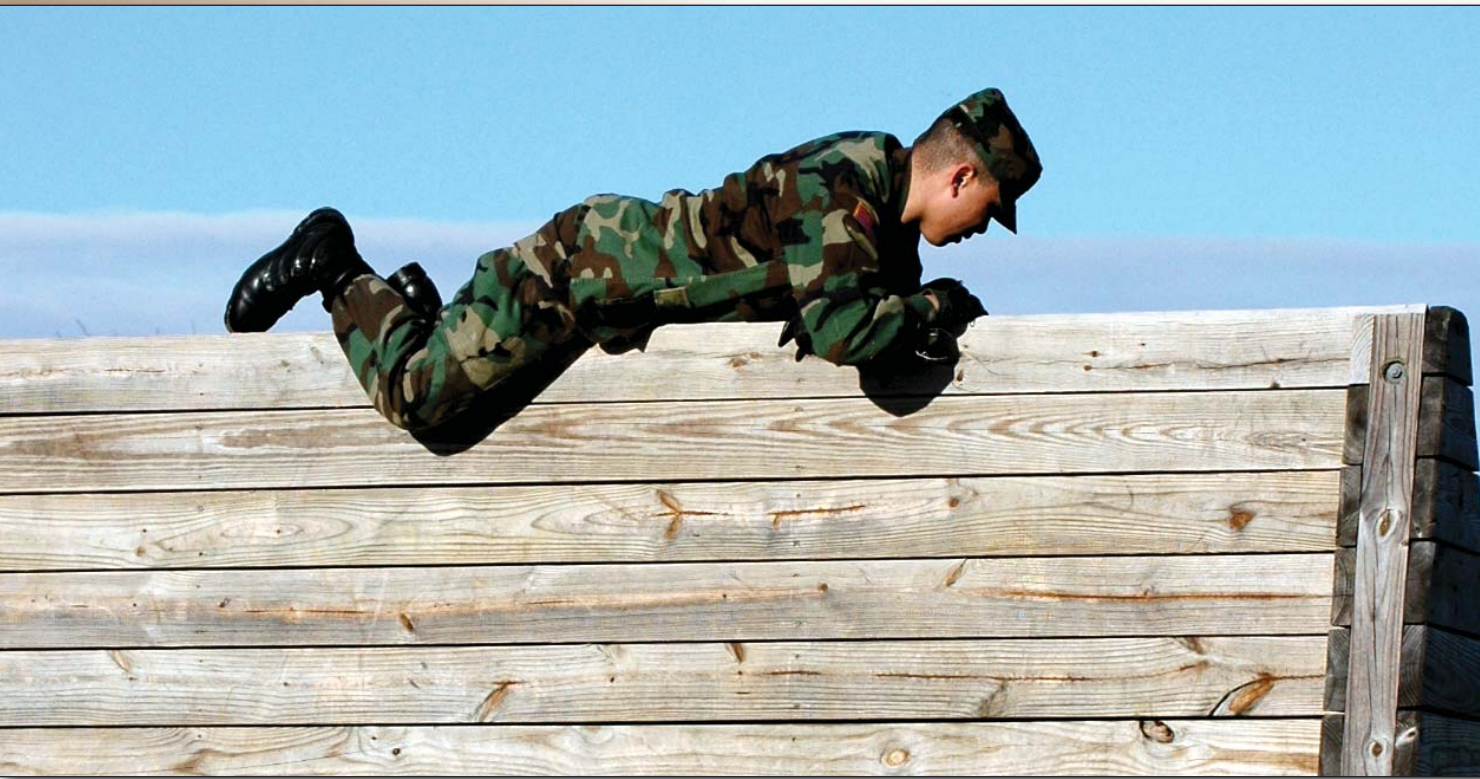
2007 Soldier of the Year Spc. Bobbie S. Bohorquez, U.S. Army Research, Development and Engineering Command's U.S. Army Soldiers System Center, strains to keep a grip during the obstacle course test.



Sgt. Jason Barksdale, McAfee U.S. Army Health Clinic, White Sands Missile Range, climbs the rope ladder obstacle.



Sgt. Scott Hardenstine, Kirk U.S. Army Health Clinic, counters a simulated attack while Staff Sgt. Marquis A. Walke, RDECOM's U.S. Army Communications-Electronics Research, Development and Engineering Center, stays low and provides cover.



Walke, RDECOM, CERDEC, pulls himself over the wall.



Left to right, 2007 Noncommissioned Officer of the Year Staff Sgt. Kevin Shewmaker, RDECOM's SSC, Barksdale, and Spc. Floyd Willis, RDECOM's CERDEC, react to an explosion by taking defensive precautions.



Sgt. Richard Candelario, RDECOM, U.S. Army Research Lab, White Sands Missile Range, crawls under barbed wire during the obstacle course test.



Willis searches a vehicle for hidden explosive devices.

Reaching deep: Soldiers compete for 2007 APG Noncommissioned Officer and Soldier of the Year honors

Story and photos by
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Two U.S. Army Research Development and Engineering Command Soldiers have been selected as the 2007 Aberdeen Proving Ground Noncommissioned Officer and Soldier of the Year after a week of competition which began April 16.

Staff Sgt. Kevin Shewmaker and Spc. Bobbie S. Bohorquez, respectively, are both assigned to the U.S. Army Natick Soldier Research and Development Center, an RDECOM subordinate command located in Natick, Mass.

Five NCOs and two junior enlisted Soldiers participated in the competition, which was open to every major unit assigned to APG; each unit was allowed to select one NCO or Soldier to represent them.

"This is truly an honor to win," Bohorquez said. "My whole detachment played a part in preparing me, so I wanted to make them proud. Hooah."

Winning was especially important to Shewmaker because it provided a gauge for his abilities.

"I was able to compete against my peers and

really see how I stood level wise. Winning has increased my confidence that I can be a good leader to the Soldiers in my unit," he said.

"It's a privilege, really, to represent your unit," said RDECOM Command Sgt. Maj. Eloy H. Alcivar. "I've participated as a private, private first class, specialist, sergeant, staff sergeant and sergeant first class. Fortunately, I won a lot."

The three-day competition, which was held April 17 through 19, consisted of 40 Warrior Tasks and 11 Battle Drills.

"Warrior Tasks are basic combat skills needed by the Soldier to be a better warrior in the battlefield," Alcivar said. "If a Soldier masters all these tasks and drills, he or she is not going to have much of a problem surviving in the battlefield. This year's competition featured more tasks and drills and had a higher level of difficulty."

The simulated tests included surviving an attack while on patrol, performing first aid and calling in a medical evacuation, sending a spot report, searching vehicles for explosive devices and performing self decontamination while in a nuclear-biological-chemical environment.

In addition to the physical rigors of the

competition, the participants completed a 100-question multiple-choice test, an essay and an oral examination.

"Each participant had to appear in his or her Class A uniform and answer an hour's worth of questions from a panel of six senior command sergeants major," said Sgt. 1st Class Ralph W. Brewer II, U.S. Army Research Laboratory, Robotics Program Office, APG. "They were judged on their poise as well as their across-the-board knowledge."

Shewmaker described his time before the panel as nerve wracking.

"That was definitely the most difficult aspect of the competition for me," he said. "I'm glad it was the first event; the rest of the competition was easy after that."

For Bohorquez, the difficulty was in the obstacle course.

"You have to use a lot of upper-body strength, and most females don't have that much," she said.

Because strengths and challenges varied with each participant, a holistic point system was used during the evaluation process. The NCO and Soldier with the most points at the end of the competition were the winners.

"The assimilation of knowledge is important,

but the evaluation process looks at more than just the depth of knowledge and skill: military bearing, self presentation and leadership qualities all go into making a good Soldier, so we take those into consideration as well," Brewer said. "This competition covers such a wide range of activities that you really have to be well-rounded in order to win."

To do so, Brewer suggests preparing well in advance.

"If the supervisors and the Soldiers are thinking about participating in next year's competition, they need to start training now so they can break the information down into smaller chunks," he said. "Cramming it all in a month or a few weeks is going to cause an information overload, and the Soldier is going to miss something. I would also contact the participants from the previous competition to find out what worked."

Both winners recommended plenty of land navigation drills, lots of physical training and approaching the competition with the right attitude.

"I would tell anyone who is thinking about participating to have a sense of pride, exhibit that warrior spirit and give one hundred and ten percent because this competition will

improve you," Shewmaker said. "It is excellent for assimilating knowledge because it has a wide range of tasks that Soldiers have to do on a daily basis. It helped me evaluate my strengths and weaknesses: when I messed up, I knew right then and there what I needed to work on."

In addition to the benefits of training, Alcivar encourages young Soldiers to participate in competitions such as this because they are important for career development.

"It helps you become more aware and knowledgeable on how to progress through the ranks. It's a very effective way to become more competent in your field because you are exposed to and are competing with the best," he said. "I was particularly proud of winning Soldier of the Year which was held at Fort Campbell, Ky. I was just starting my career, and it was an overwhelming feeling of accomplishment. The most important thing that I got out of the competition was improving my levels of confidence and competence."

Shewmaker hopes the competition will continue his growth as a Soldier and help him prepare for future assignments.

"I'm going to go back to my unit, improve on the things I didn't do well at this competition

and be the best Soldier I can be," Shewmaker said. "However, I'm ready to move on and deploy to Iraq. I'd also like to see different parts of the Army other than research and development," he said.

Bohorquez said she will continue working on her college degree in health finance, but plans to reenlist as an 88M, motor transport operator.

"They're full battle rattle. I'd like to be out in the field more because I'm not the type that likes to be behind a desk all day. By driving a truck, I could interact with other Soldiers, but for now I'm focusing on winning this competition at the next level and moving on," she said.

The U.S. Army Materiel Command competition will be held at Fort A.P. Hill, Va.; the winners will then move on to the Department of Army competition.

In the meantime, Bohorquez and Shewmaker will be recognized for their accomplishment and receive an Army Commendation Medal at the official award ceremony in May at APG's Top of the Bay.

"Everyone who competed received a certificate, but the most valuable things the winners receive are knowledge, training, pride and a sense of accomplishment," Alcivar said.

NCO candidates

- Staff Sgt. Marquis A. Walke, U.S. Army Communications Electronics Research, Development and Engineering Center, Fort Monmouth, N.J.
- Sgt. Richard Candelario, U.S. Army Research Laboratory, White Sands Missile Range, N.M.
- Staff Sgt. Eric Hollis, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 16th Ordnance Battalion, Aberdeen Proving Ground, Md.
- Staff Sgt. Kevin Shewmaker, U.S. Army Soldier Systems Center, Natick, Mass.
- Sgt. Scott Hardenstine, Kirk U.S. Army Health Clinic, Aberdeen Proving Ground, Md.
- Sgt. Jason Barksdale, McAfee U.S. Army Health Clinic, White Sands Missile Range, N.M.

Junior enlisted candidates

- Spc. Bobbie S. Bohorquez, U.S. Army Soldier Systems Center, Natick, Mass.
- Spc. Floyd Willis, U.S. Army Communications-Electronics Research, Development and Engineering Center, Fort Monmouth, N.J.